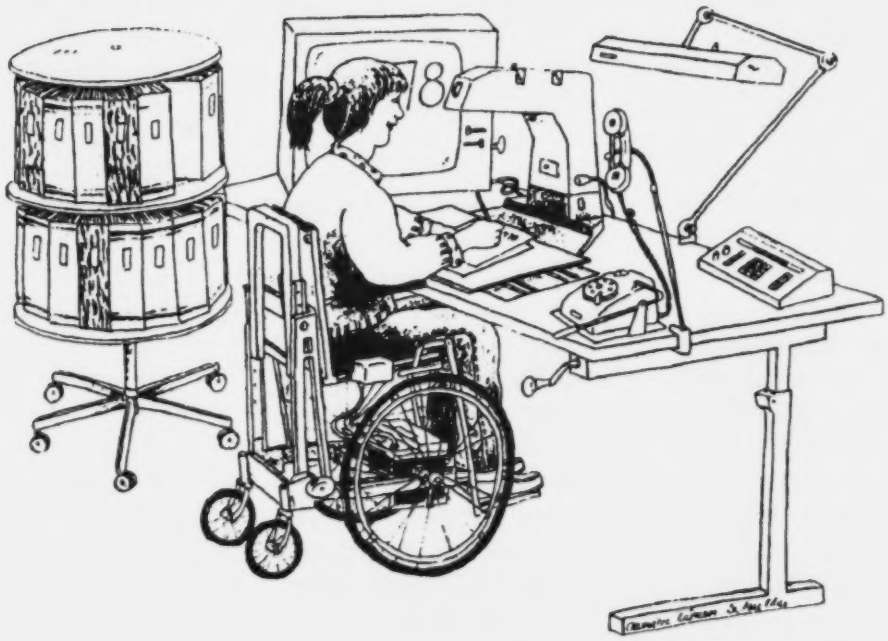
WOMEN 2000

No. 1, 1991



DISABLED WOMEN

People are defined as disabled if they suffer from a physical, mental or sensory impairment. Disabled women are one group of women who were identified in the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women[1] as particularly vulnerable and as meriting special concern. The basis for their vulnerability as a group is their potential experience of double discrimination. A disabled woman, like any other woman, may suffer from discrimination on account of her sex. As a disabled person, she may suffer from further discrimination on account of her disability. Seventeen experts participating in the Seminar on Women and Disability, held at Vienna from 20 to 24 August 1990, attempted to identify these double-discrimination issues and to formulate practical measures to meet the special needs of disabled women. The Seminar was organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Office at Vienna, and Disabled Peoples' International (DPI).

BACKGROUND

Until 10 years ago, the dual disadvantages of a person being female and disabled had been largely disregarded and ignored. Only in the late 1970s, during the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, 1976-1985, when discrimination against women became a much debated topic, and subsequently during the 1980s following the International Year of Disabled Persons (1981) and the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (1982) did the subject begin to appear on national and international agenda. Since then, the situation concerning all disabled persons has changed dramatically. Whereas, previously, action tended to be on the part of able-bodied people for the disabled, emphasis is now laid strongly on self-help programmes and organizations of the disabled. Within these organizations, however, disabled men appear to hold more of the leading positions and, in several of them, women are forming working groups and sub-committees to deal with the specific problems of disabled women. A number of national, regional and international meetings have been held by non-governmental organizations to analyse and deal with these problems.

The findings of the Seminar will be included in the report of the Secretary-General on vulnerable women, including migrant women, which the Commission on the Status of Women will discuss at its thirty-fifth session, in 1991, under the priority theme for equality. The Commission will consider the full and constructive integration of disabled women into development at its thirty-sixth session, to be held in 1992, under the priority theme for development "Integration of women in the process of development".

"The consequences of deficiencies and disablement are particularly serious for women. There are a great many countries where women are subjected to social, cultural and economic disadvantages which impede their access to, for example, health care, education, vocational training and employment. If, in addition, they are physically or mentally disabled their chances of overcoming their disablement are diminished, which makes it all the more difficult for them to take part in community life. In families, the responsibility for caring for a disabled parent often lies with women, which considerably limits their freedom and their possibilities of taking part in other activities."

("World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons", (A/37/351/Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1, annex), para. 45.)

"It is generally accepted that women constitute a significant number of the estimated 500 million people who are disabled as a consequence of mental, physical or sensory impairment. Many factors contribute to the rising numbers of disabled persons, including war and other forms of violence, poverty, hunger, nutritional deficiencies, epidemics and work-related accidents. The recognition of their human dignity and human rights and the full participation by disabled women in society is still limited, and this presents additional problems for women who may have domestic and other responsibilities. It is recommended that Governments should adopt the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975) and the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons (1982) which provide an overall framework for action and also refer to problems specific to women that have not been fully appreciated by society because they are still not well known or understood. Community-based occupational and social rehabilitation measures, support services to help them with their domestic responsibilities, as well as opportunities for the participation of such women in all aspects of life should be provided. The rights of intellectually disabled women to obtain health information and advice and to consent to or refuse medical treatment should be respected; similarly, the rights of intellectually disabled minors should be respected."

(Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, para. 296.)

CURRENT SITUATION

In recent years, considerable progress has been made towards alleviating the hardships of the disabled, as well as towards recognizing their potential contribution to development. Equality legislation concerning disabled persons has been adopted in a number of countries and efforts are being made to facilitate their total integration into society. It is perhaps on account of these improvements that disabled women are becoming more aware of their particularly disadvantaged situation as they witness their own lack of equality with disabled men.

Statistics on disabled populations disaggregated by sex are scarce and it is therefore not possible to establish even how many women are disabled, let alone the conditions under which they live and the assistance they receive. Although estimates of the numbers of disabled women exist, none could be said to be definitive. A few of the case-studies presented to the Seminar provide statistical information: according to a survey conducted in 1985, there were an estimated 496,650 disabled women in Greece, comprising almost 5 per cent of the total population; the percentage of women among the disabled of the Congo and Norway was identified as 60 per cent; in Egypt, an estimated 2.7 million women were disabled. The general tendency is to take the estimate of the World Health Organization of 10 per cent as an indicator of the world's disabled population (considered by many to be an underestimate), and assume that, of that, 5 per cent are women. According to statistics collected in 32 countries and territories, shown in the table below, however, in most countries there are more disabled men than disabled women. Exceptions include those countries in which there are more elderly women than elderly men as there is evidence that disability rates are higher in older age groups of women.[2]

In many developing countries, household surveys exist that could be evaluated for the purpose of compiling data on disabled persons. However, women are not fully accounted for in such surveys and there is little literature on the position of women with disabilities in developing countries. Some of the causes of disability in the developing world are destined to affect women first because of their inferior status: for instance, poverty and the related malnutrition; illiteracy and ignorance and the related risk of disease; and the lack of health care, innoculations and natal care for mother and child.

Women as a percentage of disabled persons, 1980 census

Austria	55.2	Kuwait	33.6
Bahrein	35.8	Mali	48.0
Burma	46.6	Nepal	37.7
Canada	53.3	Netherlands Antilles	44.9
Cape Verde	62.7	Norway	55.4
Central African Republic	46.2	Pakistan	55.5
China	45.3	Philippines	41.9
Comoros	34.7	Spain	71.7
Cuba	33.6	Sri Lanka	43.0
Denmark	34.1	Swaziland	44.6
Egypt	25.5	Sweden	50.7
Ethiopia	43.5	Thailand	42.4
Finland	52.3	Trinidad and Tobago	41.8
Germany, Federal Republic of	47.4	Tunisia	38.7
Ireland	38.5	Turkey	39.6
Jordan	37.3	Venezuela	37.3

Source: United Nations Disability Statistics Data Base, 1989.

READEX FICHE

ATTITUDES

Disabled women have to experience social isolation more than disabled men because of the stigma of disability and the myths and fears linked to it. This is particularly true of societies where concepts of traditional roles prevail and determine the status of women. A fundamental issue in overcoming obstacles to women's participation in society is the creation within it of an acceptance of the capacity of disabled women to function, within the limits set by the disability itself, as normal members of society. Such acceptance is rare, however, because of the cumulative effects of attitudes and role expectations. If one of the major obstacles to achieving full equality between men and women is attitudinal, this is doubly true for disabled women. Furthermore, whereas women all over the world are striving to be seen as fellow human beings on an equal footing with men rather than merely as stereotyped women, disabled women are striving to be seen as women first rather than as disabled persons. In general, the assumptions made by the able-bodied majority of the population about the roles and abilities of disabled women are not true. As can be seen from the paragraphs below, sex-stereotyping pervades all spheres of life: education, training, employment, family life and benefits. Sex-stereotyping may be even more prominent in the case of disabled persons. The case-studies reveal that the problem is universal.

"It is, of course, extremely demanding to manage both a job and a traditional woman's role, and then, on top of that, a disability as well. These old stereotyped role patterns need to be analysed and re-evaluated to strengthen the identity of disabled women."[3]

"It is taken for granted that women with disabilities can be provided for by a husband or by parents. Also it is assumed that women with disabilities can manage more than men with disabilities in the way of housework and personal hygiene."[4]

"Youth and attractiveness remain the most important criteria for female success. ... The outside world tends to perceive the disabled person in terms of his or her handicap, while the person herself remains virtually invisible. ... Role stereotyping still restricts the opportunities of disabled women. In general, men are still seen as the breadwinners, while women are expected to run the household and bear and care for the children. The outside world regards disabled women as incapable of performing these tasks adequately."[5]

"Historically, a disabled girl's position in the family was worse than a boy's - a girl was meant to grow up, get married, have children and look after every member of the family and the house. ... so any disabled girl, depending on the grade of her disability, was considered from useless to able for inferior jobs and secondary roles. ... The disability where women have the upper hand compared with the men is mental disability. We have many women with moderate mental disability getting married and having children ... I would not consider this surprising though, we still live in a man's world and mental disability allows the woman servant role to be played!"[6]

"Traditional role for women: marriage, children, work (domestic and to feed the family). The

same traditional role is not applicable for disabled women. Some physically disabled women have children but the marriage still has a tendency not to be as stable."[7]

"Women are socialized according to certain values and perspectives which favour the dominating society. ... The social role of women is based on accomplishing the demands or expectations of others. On the other hand, people are often perceived according to their single, most salient characteristic or trait ... Consequently, a disabled woman is stereotyped according to the role society imposes on her and to the way she is perceived due to her disability."[8]

"Almost all cultures prescribe differential statuses and roles for the two sexes and in most cases, males receive the preferential share. ... Man has always admired perfection, beauty and strength. An impairment in the mental, physical, sensory and/or psychological abilities of an individual renders him vulnerable. Such impairment among females is devastating, especially in traditional societies."[9]

"Latin countries have machoist aesthetic values that make a woman with a perfect body the "ideal" type. This notion, which is exhaustively exploited by the media, generates an enormous gap between disabled women and men, disabled or not."[10]

"The problem posed by the "Venus" syndrome — is faced by women with a disability living in a country where beauty was worshipped as a Goddess. It is unfair, of course, because so many bad-looking men get on much easier."[11]

EDUCATION

In many countries, legislation guarantees equal access to education for all. While such legal rights can be bestowed on disabled girls in industrialized countries, there are still often problems to be overcome, such as access to buildings and transport and the availability of suitable educational methods and materials, especially in rural areas. In developing countries, these same problems are multiplied and magnified and other obstacles, such as poverty, ignorance and negative attitudes, also prevent disabled girls from obtaining an education that could enhance their lives.

Throughout the world, the attitudes of society form the basis of education and especially so in the case of disabled children. There appear to be two approaches on the part of parents where a disabled girl is concerned. One is to provide her with a better education than would be given to an able-bodied girl in order to make her economically independent as she would not be expected to marry. The other is to deny her all education and social intercourse, and to keep her hidden out of shame or in an effort to protect her. Especially in poor rural areas and in traditional societies where the education of girls is not considered important, disabled girls have very little chance of obtaining even an elementary education.

To the extent that they have better access to education and training, disabled men may be more easily integrated into society than disabled women. Females are less likely to be encouraged by families and schools to obtain further education and it seems to be assumed that girls who grow up with a handicap remain at home or in an institution. Women who become disabled later in life are often not encouraged to continue further education. Furthermore, there is evidence that more boys than girls are enrolled in special education. One explanation may be that educating boys with disabilities is regarded as a priority based on the stereotyped image of men who later have to support themselves and a family. Boys and girls with the same disability often receive different kinds of education and in higher education the females are channelled into traditionally female-dominated subjects.

TRAINING

There is evidence that disabled women have reduced access to rehabilitation, which reduces their opportunities for full participation and equality. For those who manage to be accepted in rehabilitation, the probability that they will obtain quality training with career perspectives is small. Often they are rehabilitated into home-based

or part-time jobs while disabled men are more likely to enter the labour force.

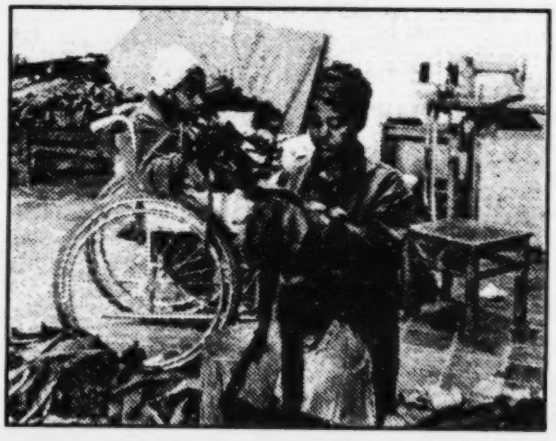
The establishment of rehabilitation and skill-training programmes specifically for disabled women is increasing and efforts are being made to integrate disabled women into income-generating activities in developing countries as awareness of their potential grows. Only a few disabled women benefit from such centres and projects, however, which are located in urban areas mostly and scarcely reach isolated districts.

Leadership and management training is offered to disabled women by several organizations to assist them in building up the self-confidence and skills required to take decisions on issues affecting the lives of other disabled people, as well as to enable them to take part more easily, and at more influential levels, in society.

EMPLOYMENT

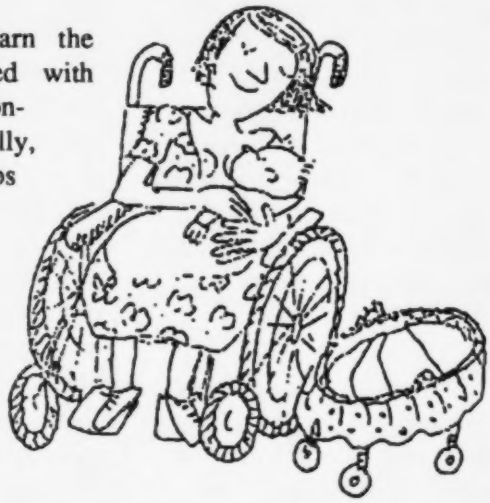
Women generally face discrimination in employment and disabled persons generally face discrimination in the labour market. These two factors combine to limit disabled women's access to employment. One of the reasons for disabled women's disadvantaged position is their lack of education and training; another is the general attitude that men, even if they are disabled, are expected to be economically independent whereas women are not. In countries where legislation provides for equal employment opportunities for disabled people, no distinction is made between disabled men and disabled women.

Disabled women earn the lowest wages compared with either disabled men or non-disabled women. Typically, they work in low paid jobs in industry and public administration as well as in the service sector. Career paths are difficult as many women opt for typically female jobs, many of which, such as that of secretary or receptionist, are often linked to a stereotyped image of physical beauty.



FAMILY LIFE

According to popular opinion, disabled women are not meant to have families. They are not expected to marry, to have intimate relationships with men, to bear children, or to be mothers. In other words, they are not expected to be women. In spite of the prevalence of such attitudes, however, many disabled women lead a normal life, and many more could if they were better informed.



"The disabled woman does not have the right to get to know her physical reality and thus decide what to do with her body. ... How many women have been dissuaded from bearing children? How many nurture the belief that sexuality is impossible? ... These questions normally

remain unanswered and affect the thing that really differentiates between the disabled man and disabled woman in the same conditions: femininity." [12]

Often living in isolation, disabled women lack opportunities for meeting potential partners. Compared to men with disabilities or non-disabled women, they are more likely never to marry, to marry later or to become divorced if they do marry. A non-disabled man seems less prepared to take a disabled woman for a wife whereas a woman, possibly on account of her traditional caring role, seems to find it easier to accept a disabled partner.

Disabled women may also face difficulties when they wish to have children. Seen as dependent and in need of care themselves, they are not expected by some societies to be able to fill the caring and nurturing mothering role. They also face problems concerning access to information and services related to their special needs and in finding doctors who will support their wishes for childbearing and accept to treat them during pregnancy.

For those disabled women who do marry and have families, the additional problems to be overcome are many and include, for instance, countering the influence of negative attitudes on their children. A disabled woman who is married is more likely to be economically dependent on her husband than a non-disabled woman. A great many disabled mothers appear to be single parents. Either they have not found a partner who is prepared to live with them, and have nevertheless not wished to relinquish their right and ability to bear children, or their husbands have left them. Marriage breakdown rates are reported to be higher for disabled women than for disabled men and disabled women are more likely to be left alone by their partners. If disability occurs after marriage, a man is more likely to divorce his wife who has become disabled whereas the marriage rarely breaks down if the man becomes disabled.

BENEFITS

Because it is assumed that disabled women are not economically independent, they receive fewer benefits than disabled men. This feature prevails even in the social security systems of highly industrialized countries and amounts to blatant discrimination. It is, for instance, easier for a man to receive a disability pension; partly because disabled men are more easily accepted in the work force and the entitlement to a pension depends on previous employment. In developing countries where social benefits are not available, families and communities are unlikely to spend hard-earned funds on supporting the independence of a disabled female member.

In terms of eligibility for social support, it is frequently disadvantageous for a disabled woman to be married. In some cases, the combined income of the couple is taken into account in establishing eligibility and it is presumed that the woman receives sufficient support from her husband. It is apparently assumed also that a disabled woman is capable of doing more housework than a disabled man and as a housewife does not need an independent means of transport.

"Statistics also show that a man with a disability will be granted more help at home from the social security than a woman with a disability can expect to get." [13]

"Just now they [the Equal Status Council] have a case for a disabled woman who was rejected financial support for a car because she was married. The authorities meant that her husband could drive her around even though he has a full-time job." [14]

"Housewives are not considered working persons. ... How this housewife gets to bring her children to nursery school, bring her shopping home and other important tasks are of no concern to the authorities who grant the transportation benefits." [15]

SEXUAL ABUSE

Any sexual activity that is not wished by a woman is sexual violence, and a woman with a disability is particularly vulnerable to violence as she is unable to defend herself. One of the problems arising from isolation and over-protection by probably well-meaning parents is that very often disabled girls are brought up in total ignorance of their sexuality. Not only is this a problem for their own development and integration into society, but it also makes them more vulnerable to sexual abuse.

"Sex education [is necessary] because disabled women are often abused and seldom loved. Sex education will give them a chance to avoid sexually transmitted diseases and to control their fertility." [16]

The dependence of disabled women on care-givers also renders them vulnerable to abuse from those care-givers as well as from others. In general, disabled women are not brought up to have an assertive attitude and often suffer abuse without complaint in order not to jeopardize the assistance that is rendered to them.

"Any woman who experiences sexual violence will have trouble regaining her self-esteem. A woman with a disability will usually have a low self-esteem to start with and may never regain what she had after experiences of sexual violence." [17]

"The criminal law against sexual violation is specially severe where it concerns women with disability, but there are no efficient structures to prevent it. This is specially important for women with mental disability. It is not sufficient to punish the abuser afterwards." [18]

SEMINAR

The Seminar at Vienna brought together international experts in the field of disability, all of whom were women and most of whom were themselves disabled. Background papers had been prepared by the Division for the Advancement of Women and by a consultant, Judith Heumann. Nineteen case-studies were presented to the Seminar reflecting the situation of disabled women throughout the world.

The Seminar was opened by the Director-General of the United Nations Office at Vienna and Head of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. In her statement, she emphasized that the focus of the Seminar was the identification of issues and the proposal of solutions related to disabled women, resulting from their lack of equality as women and as disabled people. The complex issue of changing attitudes also had to be tackled.

The Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women elaborated on specific problems to be reviewed during the Seminar and the unique opportunity it provided to discuss the attitudinal changes, the new laws and regulations and the research, statistics and studies that were needed. She emphasized that, although most studies on disability made no distinction of issues by sex, situations of double discrimination against women could be documented in a number of areas, such as education, training, health and employment. The main purpose of the Seminar was to determine the extent to which disabled women were doubly discriminated against because of their sex and their disability, and in doing so to identify the problems faced specifically by disabled women compared with disabled men and non-disabled women.

The Chairperson of the Standing Women's Committee of DPI stated that disabled women needed to be visible and the issues related to their situation needed to be heard and written about. One of the aims of the Seminar was to gather facts concerning women with disabilities and to put together action-oriented recommendations. A former Chairperson of the Standing Women's Committee of DPI stressed the need for national-level action. She said that the task of bringing issues related to disabled persons to the attention of the public and Governments was tremendous.

The participants adopted 77 recommendations, which will be presented to the Commission on the Status of Women for consideration at its thirty-fifth session under the priority theme for equality: vulnerable women, including migrant women. The recommendations are set out in the annex to the present publication.

FOLLOW-UP

The Seminar was the first United Nations meeting that had been convoked specifically to consider the problems of disabled women and the contribution that disabled women could make to development. The will to accept disabled women into all spheres of life must be strengthened at all

levels. The integration of disabled women into women's organizations is of vital importance. The goal of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies to achieve total equality between men and women by the year 2000 implies equality between all men and all women. A great deal has to be done to achieve equity between disabled women and non-disabled men.

PREVENTION

Many of the causes of disability that primarily affect women can be eliminated. This is particularly true in developing countries where malnutrition and poliomyelitis are among the major causes. Primary-health, family-planning and nutrition education, innoculation and health care, especially during and after pregnancy, are all processes that should lead to a reduction in the numbers of disabled women. In societies where girls are particularly discriminated against, education and an awareness of women's contribution to development are also important. Through improved training, work accidents could be avoided.

SELF-HELP VERSUS DEPENDENCY

While national and local facilities should be improved for the integration of disabled women into society, it is incumbent upon the family and community to assist disabled girls and women to attain the highest degree of independence possible within the limitations of their disability. This commitment will require the combined efforts of educators, care-givers and the mass media to promote general consciousness of the situation and of the potential of disabled women at all levels of society. While a disabled person's independence often depends on financial means that may not be available, self-confidence and self-esteem are valuable assets that can be obtained free of charge from a supportive environment.

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

There is no reason why the majority of disabled women should not be totally integrated into society. Given the chance, they have the potential to make a contribution to development equal to that of any other citizen. It is vital for disabled women to have access to education and training and to be accepted as useful members of the community. Furthermore, statistics on women with disabilities need to be gathered in order that major obstacles can be pin-pointed. When the facts are known, remedial action can be planned and directed to where it is most needed.

Notes

[1] *Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.85.IV.10), chap. I, sect. A, para. 296.

[2] *Development of Statistics of Disabled Persons: Case Studies* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.86.XVII.17).

[3] "Disabled women in Sweden" (SDW/1990/CS.11).

[4] "Women with disabilities: The situation in Norway" (SDW/1990/CS.14).

[5] "The position of disabled women in the Netherlands" (SDW/1990/CS.1).

[6] "The situation of Greek women with disability" (SDW/1990/CS.2).

[7] "Specific cases on disabled women: Congo" (SDW/1990/CS.4).

[8] "Women and disability" (SDW/1990/CS.5).

[9] "Disabled females: Egypt" (SDW/1990/CS.7).

[10] "Development and underdevelopment: the disabled women issue in Brazil" (SDW/1990/CS.8).

[11] "The situation of Greek women with disability" (SDW/1990/CS.2).

[12] "Development and underdevelopment: the disabled women in Brazil" (SDW.1990/CS.8).

[13] "Women with disabilities: the situation in Norway" (SDW/1990/CS.14).

[14] "Disabled women in Norway" (SDW/1990/CS.6).

[15] "Women with disabilities: the situation in Norway" (SDW/1990/CS.14).

[16] "Women and disability" (SDW/1990/CS.18).

[17] "Women with disabilities: the situation in Norway" (SWD/1990/CS.14).

[18] "The situation of Greek women with disability" (SDW/1990/CS.2).

Annex

RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Statistical information

1. National Governments should take early steps to incorporate the collection of gender-specific data on issues related to disability in existing statistical series. Moreover, each Government should undertake a country-wide survey on disability that would investigate the incidence of disability, its major causes and measures taken by individuals or families to deal with the situation. A model questionnaire should be prepared for this purpose by the United Nations Statistical Office to highlight the issue of women with disabilities and to obtain such information as income level, employment and educational attainment. Such a survey would allow an analysis of the national situation as well as permitting regional and international comparisons. Personnel trained in data collection on disabled women should, if possible, be involved in household surveys and censuses.

2. The Expert Group fully endorsed recommendation 7.m of the Expert Group Meeting on Alternative Ways to Mark the End of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons, in which was proposed the revision of the International Classification of Impairment, Disability and Handicap, that an expert meeting on definitions, composed of representatives of organizations of disabled people, should be organized by 1992.

B. Ethics and human rights

3. Disabled women should be informed of their civil and human rights in order to be able to make their own decisions.

4. Appropriate legislation that guarantees the full exercise of the rights of women to decide on sexuality, pregnancy, new reproductive technology, adoption, motherhood and any other relevant issue should be adopted and implemented.

5. No medical decisions concerning a disabled woman should be made without her informed consent.

6. Measures should be adopted to protect women with mental or learning disabilities and information should be provided in a manner that they can easily understand. When appropriate, an advocate should be provided to facilitate the decision-making of such women.

7. Open and public discussions on topics such as sexuality, which are often considered too delicate to deal with, should be encouraged, with due respect to cultural norms, in order to increase the level of knowledge of disabled women, their families, professional staff and the general population.

8. In countries where cultural and religious traditions make access to medical, vocational, rehabilitative and other services and to employment for disabled women difficult, measures should be taken to ensure that these obstacles are removed so that disabled girls and women can receive those benefits.

9. Development and application of new reproductive technologies to prevent disabilities should be seen in terms of ethical and human rights.

C. National legislation

10. National legislation should not discriminate against disabled people and should include such aspects as social security, environmental barriers, transport, and medical and technical facilities, and should take into consideration the particular needs of disabled women as their legal right. It should facilitate improvement of their situation within the family and the society.

11. Legislation to protect the civil and human rights of disabled girls and women should be passed by electoral bodies at the national or provincial levels, in compliance with international norms. This legislation should be monitored by the appropriate governmental bodies to ensure effective implementation.

12. Equalization of opportunities for disabled girls and women can only be realized when discriminatory patterns and practices that deny equal access are removed. Thus, special legislation should be prepared to deal with provisions in social security systems for women with disabilities and for young disabled mothers with children; with public transportation, in view of the fact that women are less mobile and more confined to the house due to social and cultural patterns in some regions; and in other areas where special legislation is justified by the particular situation of disabled women.

D. Conventions and other international legal instruments

13. All countries, if they have not already done so, should ratify or accede to the International Covenants on Human Rights (General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex, of 16 December 1966), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex, of 18 December 1979), as well as other relevant instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989), Convention No. 159 on the Vocational Rehabilitation and the Employment of Disabled Persons and Recommendation No. 168 on the same subject of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Agreement on the Importation of Educational, Scientific and Cultural Materials (the "Florence Agreement") and its Protocol** of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).*

14. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) should request States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women to include information on the situation of disabled women in their periodic reports to CEDAW on the implementation of the Convention.

15. In the elaboration of any new international legal instrument on disabled persons specific provision should be made for improving the situation of disabled women. Further, disabled women should be involved in the development of those instruments, especially in the work on the proposed standard rules on the equalization of opportunities for disabled children, youth and adults, as in resolution 1990/26 of 24 May 1990 of the Economic and Social Council.

E. National focal point on women with disabilities

16. A national committee with representation from the national machinery for the advancement of women, other relevant government bodies, disabled women from non-governmental organizations and experienced individuals should be the focal point for women with disabilities. That committee should act as a strong national task force to implement recommendations concerning women with disabilities, and should develop

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*Adopted by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization at Florence in 1950.

**Adopted at Nairobi in 1976.

programmes for the equalization of opportunities and the full participation of disabled women in society.

17. This national focal point should also be closely linked to existing and planned national disability committees. These committees should be strengthened, if necessary, or established where they do not exist. Disabled women and their organizations should be active members.

18. National machinery for the advancement of women should be strengthened and women with disabilities should be included in that machinery.

19. Disabled women should be actively involved in both disabled people's self-help organizations and women's organizations. Organizations of disabled persons at the national level should encourage the establishment of sub-committees of disabled women or independent disabled women's groups.

20. The national focal point, as well as disabled women themselves, should launch special campaigns to increase the membership of disabled women in those organizations. That should be the case for non-governmental organizations specialized in disabled persons as well as in other such organizations, particularly women's groups.

21. There should be a stronger presence of disabled women in national delegations to international meetings, committees and commissions concerning issues of either women or disabled persons. The participation of disabled women should be encouraged not only when topics related to them are specifically on the agenda, but also in all technical meetings.

22. Governmental and non-governmental national women's organizations and bodies should include disabled women and issues related to them within the general women's movement, and should implement action plans according to the present recommendations.

F. Leadership development

23. The purpose of leadership development should be to assist disabled girls and women to attain self-esteem and to encourage them to take leadership positions, in order to become integrated members of their communities, and to encourage their increased participation at all levels in all countries.

24. Disabled women should be incorporated in all training within all national bodies that organize leadership and management development.

25. Programmes should be designed specifically for disabled girls and women, and should be considered an integrated part of existing women's training programmes.

26. Leadership training seminars, educational programmes and job-training programmes for establishing co-operatives and income-generating activities should be organized at local level, including rural areas, to increase disabled women's awareness of their own situation at the grass-roots level.

27. The United Nations system should assist disabled women in developing leadership skills through the elaboration of model curricula by ILO, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and UNESCO to be used at various levels of leadership in all countries and through technical co-operation. Every effort should be made to have disabled women as trainers.

28. Recommendation 7.k of the Expert Group Meeting on Alternative Ways to Mark the End of the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons supporting the establishment of a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Task Force on Disabled Children, Youth and Women with participation by organizations of disabled women should be endorsed. Endorsement should also be given to the recommendation for a special

award to be presented in recognition of dedicated efforts on behalf of disabled women.

G. Education

29. Disabled women and girls should have full access and the right to primary, secondary and higher education and they should be encouraged to avail themselves of that right. Education must be in mainstream schools with special tuition requirements waived and supporting services provided, where necessary. This should also include adult literacy and other educational programmes. Disabled women should be encouraged to seek educational opportunities to enable them to advance as full members of society.

30. It is also important to educate parents and family members of disabled girls and women on how to develop positive attitudes towards disability and to bring about an awareness concerning the special needs and problems of disabled women. It would be useful to elaborate a training kit for family members, especially mothers, who are usually the primary caretakers. Existing handbooks, such as the manual on training in the community for people with disabilities, developed by the World Health Organization, should be made available for training purposes. It is important that adult disabled women are considered independent of rather than dependent on their families.

31. UNESCO should give priority attention to the concerns of disabled girls and women in its educational programmes, especially those relating to the International Literacy Year, proclaimed by the General Assembly in its resolution 42/104 of 7 December 1987.

H. Vocational training and employment

32. Employment is a critical component in enabling disabled women to achieve self-esteem and social recognition. Disabled women should be trained for employment opportunities for which there is a demand in the labour market. When special training is needed, women with disabilities should not be disadvantaged in comparison with other population groups. Disabled women should have appropriate access to all training programmes. Existing vocational training programmes for women should be made especially accessible to disabled women.

33. For the integration of disabled women into vocational training programmes, supportive services should be provided.

34. Disabled women should be encouraged to seek employment opportunities that have a reasonable wage and status. Effective assistance should be given to disabled women to maintain employment by such means as follow-up services and contacts with employers.

35. In the creation of small enterprises and other forms of self-employment, disabled women should have an equal right to financial assistance, if available.

36. The programmes of ILO and FAO, as well as other organizations concerned with employment, should take into account the needs of disabled women. Those organizations should work in close co-operation with disabled women and their organizations.

I. Marriage and parenthood

37. Taking into account that many women with disabilities experience great difficulties in getting married and setting up a family, counselling and training should be provided in this area. Media can play an important role in removing negative attitudes on marriage and parenthood of disabled persons. Non-governmen-

tal organizations should consider setting up services that would assist disabled people to meet potential spouses.

38. Disabled women should have access to family-planning methods as well as to information on the sexual functioning of their bodies. That information should be provided on cassette, in large print, in Braille and in sign language or by counsellors in public social services on a local basis.

J. Violence, sexual abuse and safety

39. Violence against disabled girls and women is a major problem. Statistics show that disabled girls and women are more likely to be the victims of violence because of their vulnerability. Special programmes to prevent such violence must be developed with an understanding of the unique needs of girls and women who need assistance with their personal hygienic care. They should be informed on how to prevent the occurrence of violence, how to recognize when violence has occurred and how to report such acts. Disabled girls and women with mental or communicative disabilities are particularly vulnerable.

40. Disabled girls and women should have access to general and specific training programmes in accordance with their needs and, where integration may be hindered, supporting services should be provided with the purpose of facilitating integration into the general population.

41. Disabled women, their families and social service personnel should be fully informed on taking precautions against sexual abuse. In the case of abuse of disabled women, especially of mentally handicapped women, legislation should be developed and enforced.

K. Mass media, communication and information

42. The visibility of disabled women has to be increased at all levels of society. The media play an important role in disseminating information on disabled women and can contribute to a positive change in public attitudes. In order to achieve this, portrayal of positive images of disabled women at all levels of society by the media (television, newspapers, publications) is imperative. Women with disabilities, preferably nominated by disabled women's organizations, should be actively consulted and involved in presentations, and should monitor the programmes. In view of the practice of exchanging radio and television productions on regional and international levels, those programmes could be disseminated on a larger scale. The use and choice of positive language describing disability and women's matters should be encouraged and deserve full media attention.

43. Governments that operate television, radio and newspapers should be encouraged to develop programming that addresses the needs of disabled women in co-operation with organizations of disabled people.

44. Examples of active women with disabilities should be shown by the media to bring about awareness in the public as well as to provide positive role models for other disabled women and girls.

45. A national network of disabled women should be initiated jointly by the national focal point and disabled women throughout the country as an important step in information sharing and dissemination, and in making aware and motivating women with disabilities to become actively involved in organizational work.

46. As part of the activities marking the end of the Decade of Disabled Persons, a special brochure on disabled women should be published and widely distributed by all national Governments and women's organizations. A special video highlighting the life of disabled women should also be produced.

47. Basic documents relevant to disabled women should be more available in local languages, where possible.

L. Counselling

48. Disabled women should be able to receive counselling services from other women with disabilities and similar experiences. These services should be available in women's organizations, organizations for the disabled, social service agencies and local services.

M. Social security

49. Disabled women should receive sufficient economic support to live with dignity, whether single or married. If they are entitled to receive social benefits, those should be given to them and not to their family.

50. Legislation and practices that discourage or prevent women with disabilities from participating in the labour force should be reviewed to eliminate work disincentives. Women should be able to receive appropriate basic financial support in order to compensate for disability-related services, such as personal assistance services, transportation, housing, technical aids and health care.

51. Provisions should be made to improve the situation of caretakers taking into account that 80 per cent are female, often family members and low paid or working on a voluntary basis. Women with disabilities should have the right and possibility to choose their attendant.

52. The subject of caretakers for disabled women should be given particular attention in preparing the priority theme on development ("Child and dependent care") for the Commission on the Status of Women in 1995 and also should be considered as a special issue by other relevant United Nations bodies.

N. Health

53. In developing countries, primary health care should cover the needs of disabled women at home and provide access to health clinics and hospitals.

54. The provision of special facilities should be made for each category of needs on a cost-effective basis, with both health care to women at home and at clinics under the existing health services system.

55. WHO and other relevant agencies should encourage Governments to provide adequate training programmes for health personnel regarding the specific needs of women and girls with disabilities.

56. There should be no discrimination against disabled women with regard to the availability of health-care services.

O. Rehabilitation

57. Rehabilitation services should be available to disabled women without sexual bias. Women should receive rehabilitation to enable them to have greater opportunities in the home and family and to participate fully in society. Medical rehabilitation services should be gender-neutral and available to all women with disabilities regardless of age.

58. Training in community-based rehabilitation approaches should be provided in all rural and urban areas with the involvement of disabled women at all levels.

P. Public buildings and housing

59. Legislation should be enacted to bring about environmental adjustments and changes in order to provide disabled women with access to all buildings including, but not limited to, hospitals, educational centres and public facilities.

60. All new housing being constructed should be accessible to disabled women.

61. Disabled women nominated by disabled people's organizations should be chosen, preferably as consultants, advisors or experts, to participate at all stages of planning and decision-taking procedures, in order to ensure that women will have access to all ranges of personal, family and social life.

Q. Transportation

62. Transportation should be accessible to all disabled women. There should be no policy that discriminates against disabled girls or women. Disabled mothers should be able to transport their children as required.

63. Special efforts should be made by those responsible for transportation to ensure that disabled women have the same access as disabled men to all services.

R. Technical needs and assistance

64. As women with disabilities have less access to equipment and technical aids, there should be local production of necessary equipment and it should be distributed to every woman with disabilities at low cost or free of charge. Programmes for the production of equipment and technical aids at the regional and national levels, including training in production and use for disabled women, are strongly recommended. Technical aids should take into account women's requirements in their design, materials and quality. If these technical aids are not available locally, the supply of imported equipment should be provided wherever needed, at work or at home.

65. Disabled girls and women should be provided with technical aids and assistance specifically designed to meet their unique needs. These services should be provided in a manner that takes into consideration the cultural and religious traditions of these women.

66. Member States should pursue such financial policies, fiscal policies and existing tax and import duty policies as are necessary to ensure that assisting devices can be obtained by disabled women at minimal cost.

S. Research

67. Any development programme for disabled women should investigate the actual living conditions of disabled women both in urban and rural areas. Furthermore, there should be research on ways and means of improving the status, raising the living standard of disabled women and providing necessary facilities for them.

68. Descriptions provided by disabled women themselves regarding their situation should be the most important source of information. Women's own interpretation and documentation of their experiences, which is now underway, can be the start of a world-wide research project on women with disabilities. It is suggested that an international network linked to the national focal point on women with disabilities should be gradually created.

69. Particular attention should be given to improving the exchange of research experiences. In this context special attention should be given to recruiting and educating suitably qualified women with disabilities as researchers.

T. Project funding

70. The United Nations and the specialized agencies and international, national and local donor agencies should include in their priorities funding for programmes for disabled women. When priorities do exist in favour of disabled persons or women in general, favourable consideration should be given to the inclusion of programmes or components of programmes for disabled women.

71. In order to implement the recommendations made for activities at the international level, appropriate resources should be made available. Developing projects for and with disabled women should get the necessary support and funding. In this respect the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons should continue to provide assistance beyond the year 1992 with priority to the issue of disabled women.

U. Regional and subregional activities

72. The regional commissions of the United Nations should include in their programmes of work special activities regarding the situation of disabled women in co-operation with other United Nations agencies, the Division for the Advancement of Women, the Social Development Division, and disabled women and their organizations.

73. Organizations working at a regional level, such as the regional commissions, regional offices of the specialized agencies, intergovernmental organizations, regional non-governmental organizations and regional networks of the mass media, are requested to provide assistance to women with disabilities.

74. Organizations of the United Nations system as well as regional intergovernmental organizations should support non-governmental organizations and organizations concerned with disabled women financially and in other ways in order to ensure disabled women the exercise of their rights.

V. International focal points

75. The designated focal point in the United Nations system for the advancement of women is the Division for the Advancement of Women; for disabled persons, it is the Social Development Division (Disabled Persons' Unit). Both entities should continue to give attention to the issues of disabled women and work in close co-operation.

76. Organizations of disabled women, including committees of larger organizations, should participate actively in intergovernmental reviews of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies and the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons as a means of promoting the implementation of the present recommendations. These organizations should in particular participate in the United Nations world conference on women to be held in 1995 and its related forum for non-governmental organizations and in similar activities relating to the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons.

77. To facilitate such participation, the international focal points should make a special effort to provide information and document distribution to disabled women, their organizations and organizations concerned with the issues of disabled women, especially through newsletters and bulletins and should seek to consult them on a regular basis.